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WARD'S ISLAND A COMMUNITY WORTH SAVING

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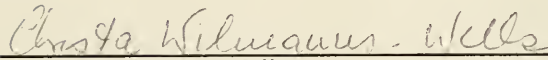
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The Graduate Program in Historic Preservation

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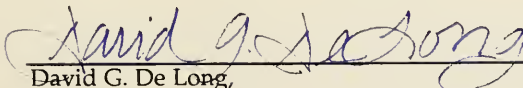
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Dedication

To my parents for their never ending love and support, and to the memory of my grandfather and D.T. who inspire and motivate me constantly.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following individuals for their tireless support, enthusiasm, encouragement and criticism in helping me write this paper: Dr. Christa Wilmanns-Wells for her wealth of knowledge and expertise as an editor and advisor. I would also like to thank John Milner for his perseverance as reader.

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Introduction

Situated on the northern shores of Lake Ontario, just south of Toronto, lies an archipelago of fifteen sandy islands named the Toronto Islands. The Toronto Islands, over time, have changed immensely in their physical formation through natural events, and with the help of man. These sandy shores were once a great peninsula sweeping in a hook formation westward creating a great shelter and protective barrier for the Toronto Harbour. (Figure 1, 2)

The peninsula's formation was a gradual one, changing and enlarging with every new deposit of sand. Just east of Toronto, great bluffs line Lake Ontario. These bluffs known as the Scarborough Heights were the main source of the material used in the formation of the Toronto Islands. These great bluffs are nine and a half miles long and are at some points three hundred feet high.¹

The Scarborough Heights is the parent rock from which the material was accumulated. After a natural weathering process by either exfoliation produced from climatic effects (sun, rain, wind, and frost) or biological attack the bluff, or parent material, was broken into smaller components and dislocated. The particles were then transported westward along by the lake and were at that point deterred by the current of the Don River. The Don River flows southward from the mainland into Lake Ontario. The force of the Don River, in combination with the onshore winds, altered the direction of currents forcing the lake waters to move towards shore. The gravel, sand, and clay were deposited at this point forming the peninsula. In a paper read before

¹A.P. Coleman, The Journal of Geology, vol. 3, no. 6, (September-October 1895), 622.

the Canadian Institute, on June 1, 1850, the peninsula guarding the Toronto Harbour was described in the following way:

The Peninsula proper has been formed solely by the mechanical action of the waves, that the sand and gravel of which it is composed have been by this action gradually transported from the eastward and deposited on the deltaic shoal of the Don River, and that the delta has thus been raised above the surface of the water and extended westward far beyond its original limits.²

The clay layers are comprised of bluish-grey clay situated in a perfectly horizontal position and are often finely laminated with sandy partings. Narrow bands of flat green concretions of impure carbonate of iron occur at various levels as well as thin layers of peaty matter. The sandy zone consists of fine yellowish or greyish sand, sometimes with thin layers reddened with garnets or blackened with magnetite. Peaty matter may be found in small amounts in the sand, and at a few points fresh-water shells were found along with the concretions. The third band of material in the tri-strata composition is a blue calcareous clay charged with polished and striated pebbles of limestone and black Utica schale, with a few Laurentian bowlers.³

The natural formation, change and accumulation the peninsula experienced over the past centuries was abruptly altered during the early hours of April 14, 1858.⁴ (Figure 3)

That long threatened disaster, the washing away of Mr. Quinn's Hotel, on the Island, has come at last. Between four and five o'clock yesterday morning the waters of the lake completely swept over a large section of the Island, entirely carrying away the Hotel and its appurtenances, along with the excuse for a breakwater erected by the Harbor Commissions, and making a permanent eastern entrance to the harbor, some five hundred

² Sanford Fleming, "Toronto Harbour-Its Formation and Preservation", The Canadian Journal, (Toronto: December 1853), 223-230.

³ A.P. Coleman, The Journal of Geology, vol. 3, no. 6, (September-October 1895)

⁴ Toronto Leader, April 14, 1958.

yards wide....This washing away of a portion of the Island will prove of much benefit to the city. It opens the eastern entrance to our harbor which has been contested for, during upwards of thirty years, but was opposed by the Board of Harbor Commissioners.⁵

The entire eastern portion of the peninsula was destroyed and created a new entrance into the harbor.(Figure 4, 5) This eastern portion of the peninsula, the small portion attaching the peninsula to the mainland, was particularly vulnerable as it was low lying and almost treeless. The appearance of the island is very singular. It lies so low that Ontario's broad expanse can be seen over it.⁶

The sandy material that had for centuries been making a slow but steady increase in the size of the peninsula was no match for this brutal, nocturnal storm. The once accessible peninsula had in a few short hours become an island. While the severe natural assault permanently altered the shape of the peninsula, it did not stop the natural action of sedimentary deposition from the parent material. As a consequence, the Toronto Islands continued to grow. During the period of 1879 to 1975 the island's total acreage has almost tripled. An indication of the increasing size of the Toronto Islands in the last century can be found in the total area measurement figures published by the Toronto Harbour Commissioners. In 1879 the island's total area was 360 acres, by 1912 the figure had risen to 563 acres, and in 1975 it was a huge 820 acres.⁷ (Figure 6) However, nature alone is not responsible for this massive increase in size in the Toronto Islands. A significant portion of it was created by dredging and landfill operations. In 1915 and 1916, three Harbour

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Souvenir of Toronto presented to the Members of the Pan-American Congress at Toronto. (Toronto: July 18-25, 1895), 35.

⁷ Ontario Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands, Pressure Island: The Report of Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands (Toronto: The Commission, 1981), 51.

Commissioners' dredges doubled the area known as Ward's Island.⁸ Until recently, the Islands had continued to grow at almost 2 feet per year. The city has created large breakwaters to alter the current flow and, ultimately, the deposits made on the shores of these islands. A visible indication of this is that the present location of the lighthouse that once stood 25 feet from the shore, is now more than 300 feet from the shoreline.⁹

Today the Toronto Islands are an amalgamation of fifteen varying islands. The islands range greatly in size and only eight of the Toronto Islands have official names: Center, Mugg's, Donut, Forestry, Olympic, South, Snake, and Algonquin. Ward's Island is not a separate island, but is the eastern portion of Center Island.¹⁰ Only official vehicles are allowed on all the islands, however, bikes and man power are encouraged. All eight of the official islands are connected by bridges, so it is possible to walk or ride from one end of the island labyrinth to the other. A ferry travels from the city to three points on the islands several times a day,(Figure 7) depending on the time of year. The stops are made at Hanlan's, Center, and Ward's Island. An icebreaker is supplied during the winter months, since the lake often freezes.(Figure 8) Recreational facilities abound on Center Island including a restaurant, boating, and amusement rides. There are no commercial districts on the islands except for a small restaurant on Center Island. Residents of the islands must do all their shopping, laundry, and any other chores in the city. The island has a school for children up to the sixth grade. The island also claims an airport which offers flights to other major Canadian cities as well as some American cities.

⁸ Ibid., 51.

⁹Students of Toronto Island Public School, A History of the Toronto Islands (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1972), 7.

¹⁰ Ibid., 52.

There are only two remaining residential areas on all of the Toronto Islands. One of the two residential islands is Algonquin Island where 205 houses remain. Many of these homes were floated over from Hanlan's Island in 1937 when it was cleared for the airport.¹¹ The other residential area comprises the community on Ward's Island today, it encompasses a 12 acre region, only one 66th of the entire 820 acre park. There remain 147 residences, most of which are occupied on a yearly basis and a centrally located club house. The layout of the streets remains as it has been since 1915 and the streets are named sequentially First, Second, Third, Forth, Fifth, Sixth Streets, as well as Bayview, Willow, Channel, Lenore and Lakeshore Avenues and Withrow Street.(Figure 9)

The residents of Ward's Island have fought long and hard to maintain a community on the island. The struggle to sustain the community has been a bitter fight between the City of Toronto who wanted to demolish the community and the residents of the island who want to maintain the residential neighborhood. The battle of whether the residents could remain on the island legally has been a conflict that has lasted decades. It is only through the following type of analysis that one can begin to understand the motivation behind the fight.

¹¹ Ibid., 40.

Chapter 1

Early Inhabitants of the Toronto Islands

The first people to use the "islands" for their own benefit were the native Indians. There is no record of any permanent Indian settlements on the Peninsula, but Indians certainly raised what Joseph Bouchette had called their "ephemeral habitations" from time to time on its sandy shores. The Indians appear to have been the first to recognize the islands' value as a health resort.¹² (Figure 10) The native Indians used the islands as a spa for the elderly and ailing.¹³ In September 1793, Governor Simcoe remarked to the Duke of Richmond that, "the sandy Peninsula is so healthy, as that the native Indians have requested permission to encamp upon it with their families in the Sickly Season."¹⁴

The Indians, like the white settlers, hunted and fished on the Peninsula, trapping muskrat among its reeds, dredging giant turtles out of its muddy ponds, spearing fish in its shallow lagoons and shooting duck and geese and other fowl fattened on its wild rice.¹⁵

This early establishment of "place" by both the native Indians and the white fishermen is important to recognize, for it is this passionate attachment to the land that instigated the initial interest in this location. The intimate understanding of the land by both the hunters and fishermen ultimately influenced the form and location of the initial structures on Ward's Island. The knowledge of the winds, floods, seasonal changes, tides,

¹² Sally Gibson, More Than an Island: A History of the Toronto Islands (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1984), 21-22.

¹³ Ontario Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands, Pressure Island: The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands (Toronto: The Commission, 1981), 59.

¹⁴ Sally Gibson, More Than an Island (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1984), 21, 22.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

animals' habits, and fish patterns would all be unspoken indicators when the first tents were erected.

Even among people today, the really experienced hunters or fishermen perceive with their whole body the layout of the landscape and waterscapes in which they practice their particular sport. They come to know almost instinctively the habits of the animals that interest them and how these habits are affected by the seasons, the vagaries of the weather, and other aspects of the environment.¹⁶

At one time the Indian tribe of the Mississaugas owned the peninsula. Land grant history shows that the present site of Toronto formed part of the original Toronto Purchase from the Mississaugas of the New Credit in the year 1787.¹⁷ The island was later granted to the city. By land grant dated five days before confederation (June 26, 1867), the Province of Canada granted the following lands on Toronto Island to the City of Toronto:

City of Toronto, in the County of York, in Our said Province, composed of All that part of the Peninsula which forms the HARBOR of the said CITY OF TORONTO, lying West of the Gap and known as the ISLAND with the exception of a Block or tract of Land ten acres at and adjoining the Light-house to be hereafter surveyed and its boundaries defined in a manner most All that Parcel or Tract of Land, situate in the Liberties of the suitable for the said Light-house...

Pursuant to section 108 and item 2 of the Third Schedule to "The British North America Act, 1867" "Public Harbours" (as of July 1, 1867) were to be the property of Canada. This, of course, vested ownership of Toronto Harbour in the Queen in Right of Canada. Through letters Patent dated June 4, 1896, Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada and Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Ontario granted and quit claimed to the City of Toronto.¹⁸

¹⁶ Rene Dubois, *The Wooing of Earth* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), 9.

¹⁷ Ontario Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands, *Pressure Island: The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands* (Toronto: The Commission, 1981), 59.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

The first structure to be erected on the peninsula was a blockhouse built by the Queen's Rangers at Gibraltar Point in 1793. (Figure 4) Shortly there after, in 1808, a lighthouse was built at Gibraltar Point. The lighthouse keeper's shack located just northwest of the lighthouse was the first known dwelling on the peninsula.¹⁹

Shortly after the island was used by the Queen's Rangers for military purposes white man started to use the island for their own personal enjoyment. Fishermen, hunters and horsemen were the main inhabitants of the islands in the early 1800's. The first families to settle on the island lands were fishermen.²⁰

The site of Toronto was partially chosen because of the well protected harbour. The peninsula and the bay that it embraced were naturally the focus of much of the outdoor recreation life of York's (later to be renamed Toronto). In addition, there were the more conventional sporting activities-like swimming, sailing, fishing, hunting, picnicking, riding, walking, skating, curling and caroling-the bay and peninsula also provided the grounds for fox hunting and dueling.²¹

The island was not only a spa for the elderly and ailing Indians, but in 1834 the island was used as a temporary retreat to avoid the dreaded disease of cholera. Torontonians moved onto the island during this summer to escape the heat of the city and to remain isolated from the disease.

As early as 1857, the City's Committee on Finance and Assessment recommended to Council that, "the laying (out) and disposition of the Peninsula for summer residents might be made to contribute to the health and pleasure of the inhabitants."²²

¹⁹ Ibid., 75.

²⁰ Ibid., 75.

²¹ Sally Gibson, More than an Island (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1984), 23.

²² Ibid., 24.

Different types of people would congregate in different islands. Some islands enjoyed great prosperity and a rich cultural life. Of the fifteen islands in the archipelago two were particularly affluent: Center Island and Hanlan Island both enjoyed a social life of the upper echelon of Toronto's wealthiest. Both Hanlan's Island and Center Island had large hotels, restaurants, amusement parks, paths for promenading, and large summer cottages.

The City of Toronto established a 200-acre Island Park in 1888. Hotels built in the 1880's on Hanlan's and Ward's Island, the Hanlan Amusement Park and Toronto Baseball Stadium at Hanlan's, attracted large numbers of visitors. By the turn of the century, there were approximately 3,000 summer residents mostly located at Hanlan's and Center Island. A tent city was organized in 1913 on Ward's Island to accommodate those who simply pitched tents there for the summer months. With the advent of the automobile, the "elite" of Toronto left the Islands as a vacation site and began traveling to cottage country at Lake Simcoe.²³

In the summer of 1895 the Toronto Islands were promoted to the Members of the Pan-American Congress as an attractive summer resort, which had contributed largely to the healthfulness and prosperity of its citizens. The island is a sandy strip of land about six miles in length, narrow in places and widening out at its western extremity to its greatest breadth, which is here about a mile. Its widest part is curiously intersected with miniature ponds and lagoons in which are to be found beautiful bullrushes, white and yellow water lilies and aquatic plants, and which once were the continual abiding place of innumerable waterfowl.²⁴

Hanlan and Center Islands both have a rich cultural history, however, it is the less publicized, less auspicious sibling, Ward's Island, that will be

²³ Ontario Commission into the Inquiry of the Toronto Islands, Pressure Island: The Report of the Commission into the Inquiry of the Toronto Islands (Toronto: The Commission, 1981), 75.

²⁴ Souvenir of Toronto presented to the Members of the Pan-American Congress at Toronto (Toronto: July 18-25, 1895), 35.

discussed in the following chapters. Ward's Island architecture developed out of necessity, not out of pattern books or fashion, and it is the development of this vernacular architecture which developed with an absence of style and self acknowledgment that will be the focus of the rest of this paper.

Over at Center the prevailing idea is comfort and luxury, and that there is nothing more in life. We at Ward's are content with four walls of canvas, happy in health, and bubbling over with vitality in our enthusiasm.²⁵

A more indelible mark, however, was left by less affluent individual Torontonians who voted with their plimsoled feet. To them Ward's Island was not an "eyesore," but a veritable-if somewhat sandy-summer paradise.²⁶

²⁵"Editorial Flashes" Ward's Island Weekly Vol. 2, No. 1 July 1918, 4.

²⁶ Sally Gibson, More than an Island (Toronto, Irwin Publishing, 1984), 130.

Chapter 2

Ward's Island: the People Make a Place

The last decade of the nineteenth century provided all the factors that were necessary for the springing up of a large and intensive summering movement in Ontario.²⁷ Many other regions including Cape Cod, Nantucket, and Martha's Vineyard all in the state of Massachusetts, had enjoyed a flourishing summer community for decades. By 1886 there was already a creditable network of railways across southern Ontario, penetrating all the way into the Shield. There was a rapid growth in the cities as a result of industrialization. By 1881, Toronto's population was still under the 100,000 mark, it would double in the subsequent decade. Urbanization in the province had not yet reached the half-way mark (at which the numbers of urban and rural dwellers are equal), but it did so in the next ten years.²⁸ With the coming in 1896 of an economic boom that lasted nearly two decades (until the crash of 1913), the resorts of Ontario flourished. This first boom created an environment unsurpassed for the summer resort in this part of the country, more people may have been traveling to summer resorts than ever before. This was the first time when cleavage between the classes, the distinction between fashionable society and a growing proletariat, first became marked. Social divisions along economic lines, regional, ethnic, and religious lines appeared. This was true in the city, where rising values of real property fostered the segregation of the different classes from each other, but inevitably their strongest manifestation was in the summer resort.²⁹

²⁷ Roy I. Wolfe, "Ontario History: The Resorts of Ontario in the 19th Century" The Ontario Historical Society vol. LIV no.3 (Toronto: September 1962), 157.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.

The evolution of Ward's Island began as a haphazard, lower class fishing community and was appropriately named after an early fishing family. David Ward and his family settled on the peninsula in the early 1830's.³⁰ The small residential community on Ward's Island was settled by a group of people whose concerns lay in sport, bathing, community life, and a healthy atmosphere.

At the turn of the century Ward's was the middle class counterpart of Center (Island). For it was here that the working man came to escape the sweltering heat of the city. He couldn't afford to build a mansion, or even a small cottage, so he simply pitched a tent and more or less squatted for the summer. The fishing was great-plenty of bass, pike and perch- and the children had acres of sandy beach and rolling meadows to explore. ³¹

Ward's Island did not begin as a planned summer resort. In fact, the first structure to be erected on Ward's Island was neither private, nor residential. On May 23, 1881, the Toronto City Council read a letter from Eratus Wiman of New York offering to build two public baths, one a floating bathhouse, at the bottom of Frederick Street (in the city of Toronto), and another at Ward's Island³².(Figure 11) Eratus Wiman was alderman for St. Andrew's ward, a political district in Toronto in 1869, but moved to New York in 1871.

The motivation behind the donation by Eratus Wiman was to provide "free facilities for Toronto's less affluent citizens."³³ Ward's Island, since its inception, has catered to a less fortunate group of people. While both the ideas and spirit were grand on the Island, the enthusiasm was never reflected

³⁰ Robert Sward, The Toronto Islands (Toronto: Dreadnaught, 1983), 41.

³¹ M.J. Lennon, Memories of Toronto Island 10 Minutes and 10,000 Miles Away (Cheltenham Ontario: The Boston Mills Press, 1980), 69.

³² Ward's Island Weekly July 27, 1945, 12.

³³ Sally Gibson, More Than an Island: A History of the Toronto Islands (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1984), 90.

in the architecture. 1882 proved to be a big year on Ward's Island, when the Wiman Baths were officially opened. The Baths were designed by architect Mark Hall, who also planned most of the original buildings of the Canadian National Exhibition, and one can see the great similarity between these buildings.(Figure 12) Mr. J.B. Marshall was assigned operator of the Wiman Baths and resided in the building along with Alderman Withrow's family including his son Norman who lived upstairs. The Baths were originally located on the edge of the Bay, but a large area was subsequently filled in and customers swam in the warm pool beside the Baths. There was even a grandstand for spectators.

Four years later, in 1885, two more buildings were added, the Wiman Terrace and the Wiman Shelter. The Shelter was a building which stood at the edge of the present ball park at Ward's. It served as an open-air church, dance pavilion and game hall.³⁴

Around the turn of the century, the Wiman Baths were converted into summer apartments, six in the main Wiman Building and five in the Wiman Terrace. Campers, like the Reverend Wilkinson who conducted Sunday services at the Wiman Shelter for many years and regarded himself as one of the "aborigines of this reclaimed desert", were also allowed to pitch tents on the Wiman lots.³⁵ The Wiman buildings were torn down in the mid 1950's.

A popular bathing place demanded a good ferry service, and the Ferry Company operated the *Jessie L McEdwards* and the *Arlington* from the foot of

³⁴ Students of the Toronto Island School, A History of the Toronto Islands (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1972), 21.

³⁵ Sally Gibson, More Than an Island: A History of the Toronto Islands (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1984), 131.

Church Street on a twenty minute schedule-and the fare was only five cents.³⁶

The seclusion one could experience on the island was one of its great virtues. "A short 10 minute ferry ride provided a remoteness that was hard to find anywhere else. Early fisherman who angled along its marshy ponds and sandy shores, hunters who in-spite of city bylaws and Constable Ward's best efforts, still caused "many an unwary duck to meet the flying death." "Nevertheless, gradually during the nineties increasing numbers of holiday-makers found their way to Ward's Island, its popularity was no doubt enhanced by the cities' 'free-ferry'."³⁷

It is hard to realize that Ward's Island in those days consisted of marsh and ponds, with very little dry ground, but through the untiring efforts of ex-Controller Sam McBride, sand pumps were procured, which filled in all ponds and marshes. This made it possible to lay out the streets and plan "Tented City."³⁸ (Figure 13)

The best source of information about Ward's Island during its early years is the "Ward's Island Weekly", a weekly paper put out by the Island residents themselves. Each summer, editions would start near the end of June or beginning of July and run until the end of August or early September. The first edition of the paper was printed July 14, 1917 and reported on the events of the week on the Island. Columns included an editorial, church notes, men's bowling, baseball scores, social notes, entertainment, the adults masquerade, a "This and That" column, letters home from the wars, tennis

³⁶ Ward's Island Weekly July 21, 1950.

³⁷ Sally Gibson, More Than an Island: A History of the Toronto Islands (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1984), 104.

³⁸ Ward's Island Weekly July 27 1945, 12.

titles, a list of association members with both their city and island addresses, and the financial statement for the year.

The "Ward's Island Weekly" was a way of the tenters to establish themselves as a unified community. The circulation was small, only intended for the residents themselves. It is evident from the following passage that the scope of the paper far exceeded its original intention.

Evidence that our weekly is helping to bring the Island into prominence, or to use the vernacular of the business man, "putting us on the map," has been demonstrated lately on two or three occasions. According to reports, our weekly has appeared in France, New York, Porcupine, and Youngstown Ohio. A salesman from Youngstown, last week walked into the office of a member of Wards on whose desk happened to be a copy of Wards Island Weekly. The visitor noticed it and said he had read that paper in Youngstown, just before he left, and thought what a lively bunch there must be on this Wards Island. We feel sure he won't be disappointed when he pays us a visit. Wards Island this season at any rate out-classes any other part of the Island, as it appears to carry on its old-time gaiety despite the war, not that it hasn't done its share in sending men to the front, but from the fact that it is an even-balanced crowd of people out for pleasures of life without the "I live in a better house than my neighbour" idea, so prevalent at summer resorts. We invite visitors from other towns to pay us a visit and hope it will be the means of starting other summer camps such as ours. ³⁹

The paper spanned a 45 year period and ceased at the end of the 1962 season. It continued to serve as the major source of information for those on the Island as well as off it.

Ward's Island attracted an eclectic group of personalities, no doubt, in part because of the obscure way of life on the island. Certain families such as the Wards have returned to the island for five generations enduring the hardships and reveling in the joys. While Ward's Island was not a community of wealth and luxury, the accomplishments of some of the

³⁹"Editorial Flashes" Ward's Island Weekly August 4, 1917.

residents equaled those of the greatest athlete, politician, and seaman anywhere in the world. Four residents were particularly outstanding in their accomplishments.

Norman Withrow was a child when his family first came to the Island in 1882. His family was one of the original eight families to settle on the Island. His father was Alderman Withrow and was founder and president of the Canadian National Exhibition. Norman himself at 22 years of age was the youngest musical director on the continent and was nominated to direct at Massey Hall.⁴⁰ Massey Hall is one of Canada's leading concert halls. Norman also was the first person to own a cottage on the Island. He purchased a construction shack for \$40.00 in the year 1882.

Two Olympic medalists resided on the Island. George Goulding was one, an Olympic gold medalist for the one mile in Stockholm Sweden, he held the U.S. record for the two mile race Goulding also won over 300 world wide races and retired as an undefeated champion. George Goulding moved onto the island in 1906.⁴¹

Captain Herbert King was another early resident who had a remarkable life before entering the Ward's Island community in 1918. Captain King had been on a two year trading expedition off the west coast of Africa, in 1883 he made a run from Cardiff to Calcutta in 120 days. He too was an early cottage advocate. City restrictions for Ward's Island allowed only for screened-in verandahs. But the captain wanted glass as well as screen. Captain King, being an inventive and adept resident, found an ingenious system of hinging glass windows. The windows could be swiftly lowered against the menace of the

⁴⁰ Ward's Island Weekly July 18, 1947.

⁴¹ Ibid., July 11, 1947.

driving rain or, with equal ease, hoisted rapidly aloft when faced with the threat of a too inquisitive inspector making his rounds.⁴²

The general social pattern that existed on the Island in the early days was that the women and children would stay on the Island for the entire summer only returning to the mainland for shopping, necessities, and appointments. The men, however, would make a daily pilgrimage into the City usually catching the 7:45 am ferry for their day in the office to return later that night for dinner and their favorite ball game.

With these meditations in mind I have decided to pen a few lines and remind perennial residents and newcomers how fortunate they are to have such an ideally located Island to while away the summer hours. First of all, there is that refreshing boat ride on the ferry after working in the teaming city all day; it always seemed to me like a new world when hitting the deck for home. Upon arrival a quick change into casual clothes and following dinner prepared by the world's best chefs, you are all set for the evening's entertainment which includes softball, bowling, tennis, sailing, badminton and club house activities.⁴³

The early days on Ward's Island was one of happy inconvenience, tenters learned to make do with whatever they did not have. Tents were often crowded averaging 6 to a tent, they were extremely loud as lots were very close together, and inevitable damp. Nevertheless, the residence were a resilient group who would instill a pattern of endurance that prevails today.

⁴² Ibid., July 25, 1947.

⁴³"Paradise" Ibid., June 30, 1950, 10.

Chapter 3

Pure, Simple Architecture

A row of tents on a sandy street,
With their shacks to the rear-
some dowdy, some neat,
A line of verandahs where folks
sit and talk,
As they gaze, and dissect, those
who stroll down the walk,
That's Ward's.⁴⁴

The political, social, and economic history of Ward's Island has been under arduous attack since 1894, when the Toronto Alderman Crawford and his parks committee recommended that, "all Island residential leases be terminated at maturity and not be renewed and that the houses be removed to make way for parkland to serve the needs of the rapidly growing city." As a result the architectural development on Ward's Island reflects one of uncertainty, reluctance, even opposition, as far as construction was concerned. New structures were only carried out with the greatest hesitancy. This uncertainty was an undercurrent that impaired and impeded the natural development of this community until December 1993.

The original community on Ward's Island was a transient one lasting the few short weeks of summer. The summer residents became nomads carrying their belongings from the city to the Island in June and back to the city in late August. As a result the original architecture reflects this type of transitory migration. Until the 1930's portable, lightweight tents were the prime structures to be found on Ward's Island.(Figure 14) This type of ephemeral existence can be traced as far back as ancient times.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ward's Island Weekly August 1, 1931, 15.

⁴⁵ Philip Drew, Tensile Architecture (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979), 82.

This flexible, temporary lifestyle requires a certain type of individual. Norman Withrow, a long time member of the Ward's Island community, remembers the early days on the Island:

There were no lights on the Island, except the candles and coal-oil lamps in the houses, so they would move over here for the two weeks of the month that the moon was up, and move back to the city while the moon was down. In 1883 a few other people moved over to this "sandbar", and gradually, but slowly it began to build up.⁴⁶

It was the ability of this group of people to adapt to environmental changes that allowed for the expansion of the Island community. People who built their own shelters were alert to the shortcomings of design and progressively introduced suitable corrections. Changes in the tents included adding wooden platforms to reduce the rising damp, adding wooden structures for cooking, and ridged roofs were eventually added to produce a more permanent structure. The continuous feedback between building techniques and fitness for living among the residents of Ward's Islands led everywhere to an architecture without architects, which gives to each of the old dwellings a distinctive local, vernacular character and contributes to the genius of place.⁴⁷

During the summer months of June, July, and August when Ward's Island was enjoying full occupation of the tents, the weather in Ontario lent itself to this type of a lightweight structure. The tents allowed for an immediacy and intimacy with the surrounding landscape. These canvas structures were very adaptable to the climatic conditions and the short term residency. It is no coincidence that traditional tensile building is connected with nomadic structures.⁴⁸

⁴⁶"Rambling With Reg." *Ward's Island Weekly* July 8, 1949, 5.

⁴⁷ Rene Dubois, *The Wooing of Earth* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), 117.

⁴⁸ Philip Drew, *Tensile Architecture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979), Preface.

The type of tent construction found on Ward's Island was not restricted to this location. Tent construction, design, and fabric can vary greatly depending on its function and location in the world. The residential tents manufactured in North America in the early 20th century were usually constructed from a grade of cotton, flax, hemo, or silk. Most tents were made from some variation of cotton for both durability and for economic reasons. The tents were usually constructed from 12-ounce duck. Lightweight twills, measuring 30 inches in breadth and weighing from 6.5 to 8 ounces per yard, was the material usually employed in constructing the largest tops, while 8, 10 and 12 ounce ducks are used for the smaller ones. This material is often mildew proof and the lighter weights of goods, used on large tops, are sometimes rendered waterproof by the process of parafining.⁴⁹

The original tents on the Island were striped and coloured,(Figure 15) however, these cheerful colours gave way to plain white tents.⁵⁰ There is no indication as to the change in attitude towards eliminating the colored tents in favor of the pure white ones.

This type of transient existence was not for everyone. Many of Toronto's residents did not understand the love, fascination, and intrigue with Island life. A column ran in the 1919 edition of the "Wards Island Weekly" called "The Ignorance of Some People" mocking some of their City friends. The readers were asked, if they had ever been asked these questions by some of their friends.

⁴⁹ Ernest Chandler, Awnings and Tents: Construction and Design (New York: Ernest Chandler, 1914), 222.

⁵⁰"Gone Are The Days" Ward's Island Weekly September 8, 1950, 21.

"Windows in a tent, why what do you mean?"

"Verandahs around a tent?" She raised her eyebrows an inch too when she said it.

And haven't you had some kind-hearted friend with tender solicitude as to your welfare pass such a remark as:- "You poor dear! its a wonder you don't get rheumatism rolling up in a blanket on the ground every night. I am sure I would never get any sleep. Oh, horrors! whatever do you do when it rains?" And someone else is quite sure that there is no such thing as standing room in a tent. But of course they are people who have never been to Ward's Island, and we'll say they don't know what they are missing.⁵¹

Ward's Island was not alone in its development of a tent community. Parallel camp developments had been cultivated across America during the last half of the nineteenth century and early into the twentieth century. While many of these camp sites had religious connections, their architecture was remarkably similar to that of secular Ward's Island.(Figure 16) In mid-nineteenth century, America was dotted with Methodist camp-meeting grounds where religious revivals, lasting several days, would occur regularly. (By 1875 there were eight permanent campgrounds spaced across Massachusetts alone.) Revivalists would arrive at one of these sites, rent a tent, dine and wash communally, and participate in religious meetings held in a clearing surrounded by tents.⁵²

The largest of these American Methodist campgrounds is Wesleyan Grove in Oak Bluffs (named Cottage City until 1907), in Martha's Vineyard, off the coast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts.⁵³ Wesleyan Grove became the nucleus of one of America's most popular resorts.⁵⁴ The first summer colony on Ward's Island in 1899, consisted of eight tenants, each of whom had paid a

⁵¹ Ward's Island Weekly, July 19, 1919.

⁵² Lester Walker, Tiny Tiny Houses (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1987), 46.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁴ William Nathaniel Banks, "The Wesleyan Grove campground on Martha's Vineyard" Antiques, (July 1983), 105.

fee of ten dollars ground rent for the season,⁵⁵ similarly, the site at East Chop, Martha's Vineyard was very small and only had nine tents in the year 1835.⁵⁶ The special resort qualities of Methodist Wesleyan Grove focused in the spare time on fishing, boating, sea bathing, berrying, and croquet. These activities one finds duplicated on Ward's Island, sixty five years later.

Maintenance or the lack thereof, was another principle impetus for using tents on the island. The tents were simply dismantled at the end of a season and stored in wooden boxes through the winter. Each tent sat on a very small lot and, for the health of everyone, it was imperative that everyone kept their small space in immaculate shape. In a note from the "Ward's Island Weekly" in 1923 there is a concern about the sanitary conditions and general upkeep of each "site". "There have been complaints because some tenters are throwing refuse over the breakwater...A 15 cent package of chloride of lime sprinkled around the sand about your tent and then the sand raked, helps to keep the place sanitary...Please see that the lane is 12 feet wide between your shacks."⁵⁷

In 1911, the Toronto Harbour Commissioners received title from the City of Toronto to a certain area which embraces a good portion of the Islands as they exist now. This identical area became the subject of an agreement in 1915 between the Commissioners and the City, which agreement may have had the effect of creating a tenancy with the City of Toronto as tenant and the Commissioners as landlord.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ M.J. Lennon, Memories of Toronto Island: 10 Minutes and 1,000 Miles Away (Cheltenham, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 1980).

⁵⁶ William Nathaniel Banks, "The Wesleyan Grove campground on Martha's Vineyard" Antiques (July 1983), 105.

⁵⁷ Ward's Island Weekly, July 21 1923.

⁵⁸ Ontario Commission into the Inquiry of the Toronto Islands, Pressure Island: The Report of the Ontario Commission into the Inquiry of the Toronto Islands (Toronto: The Commission, 1981), 60, 61.

Shortly before World War One, four major events occurred on Ward's Island: The tents that had once been arbitrarily arranged were organized into a systematic formation, major planting and infilling was done on the eastern portion of the Island, the Ward's Island Association was created, and "The Ward's Island Weekly" was published.

In 1913, the abundance of tents was such that the City of Toronto felt it necessary to organize the tents into streets. (Figure 9) Campers began arriving with wood burning stoves, dressers, beds, tables and chairs. Enterprising individuals built storage sheds so as not to have to carry their belongings back to the city. As the campsite became more established, a wooden structure for cooking and storage would be built behind the tent. When the family left in the fall, they just rolled up the tent and left it in the wooden box until the following spring. Soon the tents were mounted on sturdy wooden floors. Wooden kitchens, porches and rigid roofs replaced flapping canvas.⁵⁹ "Tent City" (Figure 17) remained that way for twenty years, at which time the residents were given permission to replace their tents with framed cottages.⁶⁰ The next step was to purchase a larger tent and to build a wooden platform floor on which to erect it. The wooden floor was usually attached to a wooden "kitchen", so it was only a matter of time before the canvas tent became a full fledged frame cottage.⁶¹ The evolution from tent to cottage structures progressed, in stages, with the building of floors and the addition of kitchen and porches, resulting in one story summer cottages.⁶²

Walter Dodd, a long time Island resident, remembers when there were no sidewalks on Ward's Island and "the only source of illumination was

⁵⁹ Robert Sward, The Toronto Islands (Toronto: Dreadnaught, 1983), 41.

⁶⁰ M.J. Lennon, Memories of Toronto Island: 10 Minutes and 1,000 Miles Away (Cheltenham, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 1980), 69.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁶² Ontario Commission into the Inquiry of the Toronto Islands, Pressure Island: The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands (Toronto: The Commission, 1981), 222.

either the moon or fireflies... After a while a few tents appeared, mostly along the waterfront, and then one day... the Island was laid out in sites, with board walks and Hydro lights. The locations were quickly taken up by many citizens, while the old campers sighed as they saw all these modern improvements taking the place of the good old days when they had to carry water long distances and go to bed by candle light and were never wakened in the morning by the milkman jangling his bottles."⁶³ It is also to Walter Dodd that the credit must go for suggesting the method of laying sewers, water mains and other improvements which the city carried out.⁶⁴

By the year 1917, there was a trend on the island that would continue right through the following fifty years. If a neighbor had added to or altered his or her tent or cottage in any way, all the neighbors would do the same. It was a friendly form of competitiveness that is illustrated in the structures themselves. (Figure 18) The editors of the weekly paper found some humor in it, but it was published with sincerity so that every one could make the appropriate alterations:

An epidemic of verandahs seems to have broken out on the Island, since Jones got his. We notice the following have become infected with the germ: Bill Hillock, Fat Millar, Rap Perry and Bob Gardner, whilst Joe Singer and Ernie Lye have added attics to their kenions.⁶⁵

The addition of a porch or verandah to a tent is a logical one, it is the apron of the house; it enables the outdoors to be domesticated, while giving the indoors a glimpse of fresh air.⁶⁶ The verandah has no economic preference or social bias. It is the ultimate transitional space, connecting the individual home to the communal street. It was an icon of all things to all

⁶³ Ward's Island Weekly August 7, 1920.

⁶⁴ Ibid., July 14, 1923.

⁶⁵ "Keeping up with the Joneses" Ibid., July 21, 1917.

⁶⁶ Jane Holtz Kay, "The Return of the front Porch" The New York Times C1 (June 8, 1989)

inhabitants, it was a haven of sociability combining neighborliness with distance.⁶⁷

A similar architectural metamorphosis occurred at several of the American Methodist camp meeting sites. Wesleyan Grove Campground in Martha's Vineyard experienced the same structural transitions. In the 1850's, some of the families began fortifying their tents with permanent wooden uprights and floors, and late in the decade many of the tents were being transformed into miniature wooden cottages. In the 1860's and 1870's, as more cottages were built, the number of tents dwindled until, eventually, there were none at all.⁶⁸

In Lester Walker's Tiny Tiny Houses he devotes an entire page to the transmutation of the simple tent construction to one of a small cottage. (Figure 19) This was the natural process of evolution for all but one residential structure on the island. During the entire residential development on Ward's Island one structure had a different life span. Norman Wilson and three friends owned the only structure to start out as a full cottage. At the age of eleven he and his friends, with forty dollars he had found, bought the first and for a long time the only cottage on the island:

The shack...The construction company's office, built in the winter of 1881, it was a small building, mounted on skids, and moved around the Island to be close to the current work project. It was well built however, to withstand Island storms, with its double walls of 1 1/2 inch pine, and put together with wooden pegs, and square hand-forged nails. When the contractors left the Island, I and three boys bought it for \$40.00-that was the sale price of the first cottage on Ward's Island. And it remained the one and only cottage on Ward's until only a relatively few years ago, when our tent city disappeared and our present cottages appeared. Today this link with the past still survives, the

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ William Nathaniel Banks, "The Wesleyan Grove campground on Martha's Vineyard", Antiques (July 1983), 108.

original office forms the main part of my cottage at 8 Lakeshore Ave.⁶⁹ (Figure 20)

It was during this time period of the late nineteen teens, early twenties, that the Toronto Parks Commission embarked on an extensive tree planting program. One of the biggest problems in the early days were the winds off the lake. The island was almost treeless and the winds threatened to blow the entire sandy island out to sea. Willow trees were planted in this era by the city and the tent colonists added the great poplars which still protect the island from destructive gales and extensive erosion.⁷⁰(Figure 21)

This era also produced a formal organization that served as an official representation of the community. In 1916, the Ward's Island Association was formed as a non-profit organization. Its primary responsibility was to serve as a recreational organization run by Island residents, to provide a summer program. The Ward's Island Association was comprised of some 17 men and women who were all island residents. A permanent structure, located near the Ward's Island ferry docks, was erected by island residents in the early 1920's to serve as a community hall.⁷¹ (Figure 22)

The early 1930's experienced the most dramatic change of the architecture on the Island. Until this time, bar the exception of three cottages, Ward's Island had been a community of plain canvas tents. The community enjoyed the pleasures of simple island life, and except for the modest alterations of verandahs or cooking sheds, the appearance of the tents was a reflection of this unassuming and unpretentious way of life. Until the fall of 1931 when the city by-laws permitted the building of permanent cottages

⁶⁹ Norman Wilson, *Ward's Island Weekly*, July 21, 1950.

⁷⁰ M.J. Lennon, *Memories of Toronto Islands: 10 Minutes and 1,000 Miles Away* (Cheltenham, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 1980), 69.

⁷¹ Ontario Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands, *Pressure Island: The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands* (Toronto: The Commission, 1981), p 201.

within specified limits, all sites east of the Park, except Norman Withrow's cottage on Lakeshore, Al Whitten's residence by the Gap and Bill Newcombe's home by government Wharf, were tents.⁷²

The change in attitude by the government came about because of a simple request by a tenter. It was rumored that the islander requested a permanent roof because of an ailing child. The islander went directly to the city authorities bypassing the Ward's Island Association. The City officials felt that the situation warranted special consideration and granted the individual the right to erect a permanent roof on his tent. This was done without thinking of all the circumstances and without regard to the possible results. As was the response in 1917 with the verandahs, soon many of the tenters applied for permits for permanent structures. The city proposed to grant the privilege of building a more permanent structure on certain plans to be laid down by the City architect. The leaseholder was to agree to comply within a year when signing his next lease. The present structures were to come down if they did not come within the new plans. The ground rent was to be raised and the new buildings were to be referred to the Assessment Commission to be assessed in the ordinary way.⁷³ The Ward's Island Association felt that many of the tenters would not want a change in the plans and could not afford the alterations. After many meetings with the Parks Committee, the Wards Island Association was successful in granting the privilege of erecting permanent roofs with canvas or wooden sides without changing the terms of occupation. The ground rental for tents and shacks as at present erected to be 5 cents a square foot occupied, and dating from issue of permit; 8 cents a square foot on more permanent structures.⁷⁴

⁷² Ward's Island Weekly September 8, 1950, 21.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, June 27, 1931, 9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, June 27, 1931, 9.

In the summer season of 1932, a detailed letter was sent from the City Parks Committee to the Ward's Island Association outlining the specifics of the possible changes to the structures. The letter from C. E. Chamber Commissioner of Parks specified that no building area could exceed 840 square feet, no modifications of any sort could occur without a written application, and would be subject to the approval of the City Architect and Commissioners of Parks.⁷⁵ The Commissioner also required that all structures be implemented with electric light. The following list was included in the letter as the rent schedule:

1. Those having structures in their original form, that is, with the canvas top and sides in the center, with an area of building occupation not exceeding 720 sq. feet, at an annual rental of \$35.00
2. Those of the same class but occupying a building occupation exceeding 720 square feet, up to 840 square feet, at an annual rental of \$40.00.
3. Those having structures with permanent roofs and sides with an area of building occupation not exceeding 720 square feet, at an annual rental of \$50.00.
4. Structures of the same type as No. 3 with an area of building occupation exceeding 720 square feet up to 840 square feet at an annual rental of \$60.00.⁷⁶

It is interesting to note that the third rental schedule of \$50.00 for a structure not exceeding 720 square feet is exactly the rent charged fifty years earlier in 1881 in 'Sconset, a small fishing village on the far eastern end of Nantucket, Massachusetts.⁷⁷

It was at this time that the City of Toronto entered into annual lease lots.⁷⁸ In fact, by the end of the decade the environment on the island was

⁷⁵ Ibid., May 1932.

⁷⁶ Ibid., May 1932.

⁷⁷ A. Judd Nortrup, *'Sconset Cottage Life; A Summer on Nantucket Island* (Saracuse: C.W. Bardeen, 1881), 18.

⁷⁸ Ontario Commission into the Inquiry of the Toronto Islands, *Pressure Island: The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands* (Toronto: The Commission, 1981), 86.

perceived as secure enough that some retailers in Toronto were specifically catering to, and advertising for, the Island residents. (Figure 23) One of Toronto's oldest and largest department stores created entire catalogues devoted to island and cottage life. In the 1939 edition of the "Eaton's Camp and Cottage Catalogue" the possible purchasing items ranged from awnings to wools with cottages, netting and oilcloths in-between. The department store even provided a delivery service to residents on the Islands. On page 37 of that same 1939 edition, one half page is devoted to the advertising of the Camp and Cottage section of the main Eaton's store. "Instead of having to rush here and there for little (but necessary) items for your camp or cottage, you can save time and effort by coming to this convenient center where we have grouped everything from the knife to scrape the fish, to the pan in which to fry them! A special delivery service was created by the department store to cater to the whims and needs of the Island residents.⁷⁹

With the post World War II housing crisis, the City approved, in 1947, winterizing Island homes. Island tenants were encouraged to winterize their cottages and use them on a year round basis. They were also asked to add on rooms and rent them to returning veterans.⁸⁰

The conclusive change from a summer community to a year round one, was so overwhelming, the following column entitled: "Gone Are the Days" appeared in the 1950 edition of the Ward's Island Weekly.

⁷⁹ Eaton's Camp and Cottage Catalogue (Toronto: 1939), 37.

⁸⁰ Robert Sward, The Toronto Islands (Toronto: Dreadnaught, 1983).

At one time Ward's Island might have appropriately been called "Tent City." But no more!

Gradually, as tents wore out, Islanders one by one began to build cottages. Four years ago we could count seven tents left. One year ago there were three—Steve Graham's on Channel, McCall's on First, and Thompson's on Second. Last fall, Steve put up a cottage. This spring the other two followed suit.⁸¹(Figure 24, 25, 26,)

When it was decided that the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto would assume the Toronto Islands for the purposes of converting them into a regional park, the Ontario Legislature enacted "The Municipality Of Metropolitan Toronto Amendment Act, 1956." That amendatory statute provided, in part, that "all land comprising Toronto Islands owned by the City of Toronto to use and occupy land comprising Toronto Islands owned by the Toronto Harbour Commissioners, except such portions of all such lands as are set aside and used or required for the purposes of the Toronto Island Airport", were to be vested in the Metropolitan Corporation as of January 1, 1956. This vesting provision is currently to be found in subsection 1 of section 210 of the Act.⁸²

The Metropolitan Corporation, upon assuming the Toronto Islands in 1956, acquired 160 leaseholds on Ward's Island. For some time, Ward's hotel carried on as a grocery store for residents, but it was eventually demolished. By 1960 Metro Toronto parks made clear its determination to bulldoze the houses on Ward's and Algonquin islands and make the area into park land. Islanders, faced with eviction and no compensation for the loss of their homes—dug in their heels, fought for and won yearly lease extensions.⁸³

⁸¹ Ward's Island Weekly, September 8, 1950, 21.

⁸² Ontario Commission into the Inquiry of the Toronto Islands, Pressure Island: The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands (Toronto: The Commission, 1981), 60, 61.

⁸³ Robert Sward, The Toronto Islands (Toronto: Dreadnaught, 1983), 41.

The homes on Ward's had non-compensation leases and Metropolitan Toronto fixed their termination date for December 31, 1968. However, with short-term extensions granted until 1974, and through a combination of circumstances thereafter, all 147 homes still exist today.⁸⁴

Today, the residential area of Ward's Island consists of 147 houses, a group of which is near the Ward's Island beach and the remainder are east of the Ward's Island ferry dock and across from the "village green". the latter group are set on small lots, generally 40 feet by 45 feet, reflecting their tent origin. Ward's Island homes are one-story frame cottage-like structures.⁸⁵

It is a striking feature of Ward's Island architecture that one can still see in many of the structures evidence of the evolution from 'canvas tent' to year round family cottage.⁸⁶

Following Barry Swadron's Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands, in 1980 the Provincial Government passed legislation that will allow the Ward's and Algonquin communities to be maintained until at least the year 2005. This legislation was in effect until December 1993.

As I revisit Toronto Island where I lived the first decade of my life, I don't look for what is still there. I look for what is gone. There is more to see that way. A swath of houses once ran from Tony Hopps' now-defunct store at the Ward's island docks past the equally defunct main drag at Center Island. My parents, grandparents, aunt and uncle each had a house somewhere in that swath. You won't find a trace of them now unless you bring a shovel....The City had the land and finally got the houses. Its hard to explain to a child why men come to bulldoze, burn and bury perfectly good homes. They needed the land, I heard them say, but at the time I didn't understand. It all makes perfect sense when I revisit the Island today. Through adult eyes, the necessity of the City action comes clear. The land where our houses once stood is today occupied by a Frisbee golf course. That's a series of

⁸⁴Ontario Commission into the Inquiry of the Toronto Islands, Pressure Island: The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands (Toronto: The Commission, 1981), 86.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁸⁶ Robert Sward, The Toronto Islands (Toronto: Dreadnaught 1983), 41.

metal baskets mounted on poles. You try to throw your Frisbee into the basket. They needed the land-yes- and it could have been worse. They could have used it for something silly.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Ibid., 41.

Chapter 4

Bill 61

For years the island residents have been in a state of flux. They were hesitant to invest in their houses or property for fear the City would relinquish their rights as residents. The residents have been paralyzed by the theoretical by-laws the City regulated, but unable to receive building permits. Many residents constructed alterations, or additions anyway. The impetus was usually one of necessity, as families grew larger, the cottages were literally bursting at the seams. The construction was carried out without a building permit or regard to any by-laws. Many residents without knowledge of permanence could not afford to invest in the upkeep of the cottages. Many structures had shoddy insulation and both the structures and inhabitants suffered as a result. (Figure 27) To settle the Island residents status, once and for all, a Bill was passed on December 16, 1993. Bill 61 came into force, it is an "Act Respecting Algonquin and Ward's Island and Respecting the Stewardship of the Residential Community on the Toronto Islands "(SO 1993 C15), to be known here as the Act. One of the most dramatic alterations of the Act was the transfer of title of the land from the City of Toronto to the Province of Ontario. Subsection 2.1 of the Act reads:

All the title and interest of the Metropolitan Corporation, the City or any other person, existing on the day this Act comes into force, in the land located on Algonquin Island and Ward's Island in the City of Toronto that is described in the Schedule is hereby vested in the Province of Ontario.

The "Metropolitan Corporation" is defined as the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto. In subsection 2.2 the Act includes all the "houses and

other buildings and structures on the land as described in the Schedule is hereby vested in the Province of Ontario." It also states that no compensation will be made to the City, the Corporation, or any other persons. All leases are to become null and void with the exception of the agreement dated December 26, 1911 between the City and The Harbour Commissioners. According to Doryene Piece, the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Toronto Island Land Trust, (created with the implementation of Bill 61) the political rift had been so great between the Conservative and Socialistic factions, City Council felt it could no longer be supportive of the existing island community.

For the first time, the Government of Ontario was to officially recognize the residents of the Ward's Island. The Act after vesting ownership in the Province of Ontario then was to reassign ownership to those who can substantiate their "legal" right to title of a building. However, if the Province finds that no individual is entitled to ownership the title and interest of the house will be placed in trust. As a result of this Act "a corporation without share capital known in English as the Toronto Islands Residential Community Trust Corporation" was set up. The objects of the trust are to manage the land, including the houses on the land. This trust is to be managed by a board of directors consisting of fifteen members, 10 of the members are Island residents while 5 are off Islanders.

The Act also puts into force the purchase of land leases by the "legal" owner or protected occupant. He or she may purchase a lease for the land on which the house is situate and the land used in connection with the normal enjoyment of the house. The land is offered at \$36,000 for Ward's Island and \$46,000 for Algonquin Island.

Strict time-lines are given in the Bill. For residents who are presently living on the Islands they may within 60 days of the act apply as a protected

occupant. This is important because subsection 7.1 states that any individual may apply to the Minister, within 60 days after the act came into force, for his or her entitlement to ownership of a house.

If the Minister vests the title and interest in a house in an individual who is not occupying the house on the day this Act come into force, that individual has no right to occupy the house,

(a) until the Commissioner determines that the house is not occupied by a protected occupant; or

(b) if the Commissioner determines that the house is occupied by a protected a occupant, until the protected occupant's rights to occupy the house expires or until the protected occupant ceases to occupy the house, whichever occurs first.

A protected occupant status allows the individual, or individuals to have exclusive occupation of the house until the expiry of the prescribed period of time or until he or she becomes the occupant of another house on the Island.

A house on the Island is deemed to be real property for all purposes. As defined by this Act a "house" means a building occupied or capable of being occupied as a permanent residence, and includes any accessory structures, but does not include the land on which the house is situate. An "owner" as defined by the Act, is a person or group of people who owns either a house or a vacant land lease, and are therefore, subject to the same taxes under the Assessment Act.

One of the main principles influencing the Board of Directors for the Land Trust and the Island Community was that there should be no economic eviction from the Island. If a legal owner of a house or protected occupant of the Island could not afford a land lease they should not be removed. As a result, the New Democratic Party in power at the Provincial level agreed to in Subsection 13.3(c) "designate a co-operative housing corporation to establish

and operate co-operative housing on the land described in the Schedule." This was a component of the process that insured that everyone could remain on the Island. The co-operative housing will be 80 new units comprised of four-plexes or six-plexes a plan yet to be designed. The Land Trust will also oversee construction of 30 non-co-operative single dwelling houses. 8 of these houses will be placed on vacant lots within the existing community and 22 others will be on "new land" interspersed with the co-operative housing. This "new land" is not yet zoned and never has been. According to Doryene Piece, however, it will not be zoned an R1 Z1.0 which is the zoning for the rest of the community. The R1 Z1.0 in the City of Toronto Zoning By-Law No. 438-86 (Figure 28) restricts all structures to be no taller than 10 meters, the maximum gross floor area can not be larger than 1 times the area of the lot, a set back of 6 meters, and a minimum landscaped area of 30% of the total area of the lot. These zoning regulations have never been enforced. The R1 Z1.0 is a common residential district in the City of Toronto. The "new-land", however, will have a higher density if the Trust is to construct multi-family dwellings. Three groups of people are eligible to the application list for a co-operative unit. The first consideration will go to the protected occupants who, for whatever reason, were not given legal status of a house or who could not afford the land lease. The second group, or B list, is for a second house for families already given the legal right to own. This will prove valuable to families who have experienced separation or divorce, grownup children who have a right to there own dwelling, and the third consideration will go to new families who live in the City. The rent of these co-operative houses will be pro-rated to the income of each individual owner. It is conceivable and, indeed, likely that the cost of renting a co-operative will surpass the expense of buying a 99 year land lease. The Toronto Island Land Trust promotes an

increase in the size of the population resulting, they feel, in a more viable community. The increase in size will justify the new town they are building, says Doryene Piece, including considering construction of a library, store, daycare and other facilities that neighborhoods in the city have. No consideration has gone into determining the type of construction of the new 110 units nor restrictions on demolition of existing structures. "It would be hard to put any restrictions on this community" continues Doryene Piece "we have always been a community that has survived through stubbornness, individuality and perseverance."

Before coming to Ward's Island, one often wondered why such loyalty existed among her people, and which never seemed to diminish, even with those who have been forced to live elsewhere. After enjoying one season, the reason is quite evident. Here abides a group of individuals who believe in absolute freedom, equal rights to every native, and a chance to improve ourselves both physically and mentally...it is a city of tents, each having a slight individuality of its own, and yet standing out as some homogenous scheme...It keeps from our midst cliques and class distinction...Keep it humble and when approached with foreign ideas of permanent homes and individual tastes, let us not forget that it is the simplicity of our life here on the Island which makes us happy and to change the uniformity of our dwellings would be to alter the whole character of the Island.⁸⁸

⁸⁸"Editorial Flashes" Ward's Island Weekly August 3, 1918.

Chapter 5

Who Should Decide the Future?

Before one takes at face value a decision made by an "official" or group of "officials" in determining the future of a community and its "worthiness" for preservation it is essential that one understands by whom the decisions were made and what criteria were used. When an "official" individual or group of people try to determine the value of a place through some prescribed rules, it is imperative to remember that this type of a critical evaluation is completely impartial. It precludes the vital element of a personal attachment to place. If one is an "outsider", than one's reality of the sense of "place" is that of an objective reality, while those who live in the community, have a subjective sense of reality. One must remember that it is "the uniqueness and individualism of the humanistic experience"⁸⁹ that is more important to the inhabitants than a book of rules. While human experience is not quantifiable and therefore excluded, the determination of creating or maintaining maintaining an existing place, home, dwelling, or community with a viable future should not rely on present day criteria alone, the experience of the past should be considered. Nonetheless, in 1980, before the Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands John McGinnis, Managing Director of the Toronto Historical Board, testified on the issue. The declaration of the Council of the City of Toronto, Conservation Advisory Committee under the Ontario Heritage Act, 1974, authorizes City Council to designate property within the municipality to be of historic or architectural value or interest, or to designate

⁸⁹ Wayne Kenneth David Davis and David T. Herbert, Communities Within Cities: An Urban Social Geography (New York: Halsted Press, 1993), 86.

an area of the municipality to be a "heritage conservation district."⁹⁰ Rigid limitations are placed on any alterations when such a designation has been made. The function of the Toronto Historical Board is to advise City Council whether property or an area should be designated as having architectural or historical significance.⁹¹

Without hearing the Neighborhoods Committee, Mr. McGinnis had declined to promote the idea that the residential area be declared a historical site.⁹² However, Mr. McGinnis did examine the early photographs of the island structures and came to the conclusion that these structures lacked "sufficient architectural and historical significance" to be listed.⁹³

Mr. McGinnis and his Review Committee used the following criteria to determine the outcome for not only the structures but the families on the island:

1. It is the work of or reflects the work of a major architect, designer, or landscape architect.
2. It is an outstanding example of its architectural style or period.
3. It is an example of significant engineering or method of construction.
4. It is the work of outstanding quality because of its plan or because of its external or internal treatment of materials, space or details.
5. It is a typical example of a particular period or land use category, residential, commercial, etc.
6. It is the only examples of its period.

The criteria for listing a property due to its historical importance are as follows:

⁹⁰ Ontario Commission into the Toronto Islands, Pressure Island: The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands (Toronto: The Commission, 1981), 229.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 230.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 230.

1. It is associated with a person or a group of persons of local, provincial, national or international importance.
2. It is associated with an event or movement of local, provincial, national or international importance.
3. It is associated with a history of development of an area. This category would include early structures such as farm and village houses or churches now surrounded by urban development.
4. It is the early example of the work of an important architect or builder.
5. It is an early example of a particular land use category or mode of building.
6. It has a significant relationship to the social history of the area. Included in this category would be sites used over a period of year, such as marketplaces, for example.⁹⁴

It is a tragic error that these specific sets of regulations leave out of the equation the attachment to a place, a "spirit of place", or the sense of belonging one inherits through continued use:

"Existential foothold" and "dwelling" are synonyms, and "dwelling", in an existential sense, is the purpose of architecture. Man dwells when he can orient himself within and identify himself with an environment, or, in short, when he experiences the environment as meaningful. Dwelling therefore implies something more than "shelter". It implies that the spaces where life occurs are *places*, in the true sense of the word. A place is a space which has a distinct character. Since ancient times the *genius loci*, or "spirit of place", has been recognized as the concrete reality man has to face and come to terms with in his daily life.⁹⁵

When considering a preservation plan, the components must include the history, the community for the sake of itself, and the attachment the residents feel towards that community. Economic factors must be included as a realistic measure to keep the community viable. The parameters must be

⁹⁴ Ibid., 231.

⁹⁵ Christian Norberg-Schultz, Genius Loci: Towards the Phenomenology of Architecture (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), Preface.

expanded to include more than the basic guidelines given by Mr. McGinnis and his Review Committee. J.B. Jackson points out in his Discovering the Vernacular Landscape, that the understanding and level of appreciation of a "rich vernacular heritage suggest that it is time we examine the nature of the vernacular and its historical development."⁹⁶ Rural or vernacular architecture, Jackson goes on to explain, indicates the traditional rural or small town dwelling, the dwelling of the farmer or craftsman or wage earner. Current definitions of the word usually suggest that the vernacular dwelling is designed by a local individual or a craftsman, not an architect, that it is built with local techniques, local materials, and with the local environment in mind."⁹⁷ The architecture is not stellar in its own right but exists as a link or connection to the surrounding land or landscape. "'Existential foothold' and 'dwelling' are synonyms and 'dwelling', in an existential sense, is the purpose of architecture. Man dwells when he can orient himself within and identify himself with an environment or, in short, when he experiences the environment as meaningful. Dwelling, therefore, implies something more than 'shelter'. It implies that the spaces where life occurs are *places*, in the true sense of the word. As stated previously, place is a space which has a distinct character. Since ancient times the *genius loci*, or 'spirit of place', has been recognized as the concrete reality man has to face and come to terms with in his daily life."⁹⁸

It is necessary in the case of Ward's Island, a community whose bond is strong, to not mothball the structures nor to leave the future unplanned. A strong plan should be installed to allow movement and flexibility from within while managing for unpredictable forthcoming events. "A landscape

⁹⁶ J.B. Jackson, Discovering the Vernacular Landscape (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 85.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁹⁸ Christian Norberg-Schultz, Genius Loci: Towards the Phenomenology of Architecture (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), Preface.

is not complete or even livable unless it acknowledges and celebrates the role of time and unless it builds monuments to give meaning and dignity to our short existence on earth."⁹⁹

To whom do we leave the ultimate decision about how to preserve a community? In the case of Ward's Island the following plan attempts to include the past, consider the present, and plan for the future. Preservation is an essential element in such a close knit community in order to provide a framework of succession. During the last several decades on Ward's Island a feeling of uncertainty of the future has prevailed, and as a result little care was taken to oversee harmonious construction on the Island and is depressingly obvious. "Thanks to our tradition of building with wood, and thanks also to the recent introduction of power tools, we are becoming a nation of amateur carpenters and electricians, not always knowing when to leave well enough alone."¹⁰⁰

From the beginning of time man has recognized that to create a place means to express the essence of being. The man-made environment where he lives is not a mere practical tool or the result of arbitrary happenings, it has structure and embodies meanings.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ J.B. Jackson, Discovering the Vernacular Landscape (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 112.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 87.

¹⁰¹ Christian Norberg-Schultz, Genius Loci: Towards the Phenomenology of Architecture (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 50.

Chapter 6

Preservation Plan

It is crucial to understand that the following preservation plan was neither designed to immobilize nor stagnate the growth of the community. It is rather, the intention of the plan to provide some boundaries and guidelines that will maintain the integrity and character of the structures, while allowing for the continuation of the spirited individualism that pervades on Ward's Island. Mr. McGinnis, the Managing Director of the Toronto Historical Board, proclaimed in 1980 that the "structures (on Ward's Island) lacked sufficient architectural and historical significance to be listed."¹⁰² In doing so Mr. McGinnis has implanted an idea that the structures on the Island are not worth maintaining in a manner that reflects the architectural evolution. As a result of his attitude, residents have proceeded to create a hybrid of "architectural styles" without any guidelines as to what is appropriate for the community. The small cottages today resemble an architectural assemblage ranging from small Swiss ski cabins to artists' fantasies (Figure 25, 29), this is a type of architecture without precedent on Ward's Island. It is imperative then, that standards are implemented to maintain a continuity among the structures which were at one time so prevalent. The proposed standards should serve as a basic guide in maintaining the existing residential structures, allow for repair of communal facilities, and regulate all new construction.

Ward's Island is a residential community, therefore, the consideration by which the proposed standards were created does not include any adaptive reuse programs, commercial intervention, relocation of structures, or any

¹⁰² Ontario Commission into the Toronto Islands, Pressure Island: The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Toronto Islands (Toronto: The Commission, 1981), 230.

demolition. While vacant lots do exist and it is feasible that vacant lots will become available in the future, the proposed preservation plan includes standards for infill. The standards will, however, dictate architectural materials used for both maintenance and new construction.

The proposal for existing structures includes strict reinforcement of the R1 Z1.0 zoning. No building can exceed a height of ten meters, the maximum gross floor area cannot exceed one times the area of the lot, and the lot must contain at least a 30% landscaped area of the total lot. Past construction on the Island has ignored these basic laws. In cases where the laws have been violated efforts must be made by the owner to rectify them in order to comply with the Zoning By-law.

"Much of the character of the historic buildings comes from their materials--both from their intrinsic nature and from the way they were applied."¹⁰³ It is mandatory that restrictions be placed on the material used. As historically shown, wood should be the primary source material for the frame, siding and roofing material. Glass should be implemented in appropriate places and if the need arises canvas should be used in any out door space, including verandahs and porches. The original fabric should be retained wherever possible.

The maintenance of public improvements should be strictly limited to maintenance. Rotting or deteriorating material should be replaced by compatible material, new material should be discouraged and new public structures should be prohibited.

In December of 1993 when Bill 61 "An Act Respecting Algonquin and Ward's Island and Respecting the Stewardship of the Residential Communities of the Toronto Islands" was passed one hundred and ten new

¹⁰³ Details of the Preservation Plan Historic Materials-General Principles ,.61.

residential units were incorporated without any prescription of how to incorporate them into the existing community. Eighty of these one hundred and ten land leases will be sold to the co-operative housing corporation to be built in the "new land."¹⁰⁴ This "new land" is located west of the original community, it had always remained park land and consequentially had never been residentially zoned. John Risbackus, a member of the Land Trust, has been appointed the committee member in charge of zoning and the architectural firm of Black and Moffit has been retained as architectural consultants.

A fundamental element in providing continuity on Ward's Island is to demand the same density be imposed on the "new land" that exists in the zoning By-law for the rest of the community. As the design has been put forth four-plexes and six-plexes would dominate as the basic residential units. If the R1 Z1.0 zoning was imposed, these types of multi-dwelling units would not be allowed. Under the R1 Z1.0 residential uses are confined to: "detached houses, a house for roomers, boarders or foster children, a residential care facility, private home day care, private garage (which is not applicable since cars are not allowed on the island), and a privately owned outdoor pool."¹⁰⁵ Non residential uses permit a day nursery, drinking fountains, a municipal community center, municipal reservoir, a public school, a place of worship, (all with specific restrictions) and an office of a physician or dentist, provided it is in a detached house and is restricted to the basement or first floor, and the physician or dentist uses the building or structure as the physician's or dentist's private residence.¹⁰⁶ The proposed plan of multi-story complexes

¹⁰⁴ Bill 61 Section 19 (3)

¹⁰⁵ Zoning By-Law 438-86, Section 6 paragraph f.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Section 6 (2)9.

does not seem compatible with any of these restrictions under the existing By-Law for the original lands.

The "new land" should be laid out in 40 by 45 feet lots as the original cottages had been. The lots should be positioned on streets that are synchronized with the original layout of First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Streets. The materials of the new construction should also be strictly monitored and comply with the standards of the existing fabric. The architectural fabric should be limited to wood, glass, and canvas. The set back laws of the Zoning By-Law 438-86 should be enforced. This law demands that there should be a 6 meter set back from the front line, and a side lot line set back of "0.9 meters for that portion of the building that has a depth of not more than 17.0 meters and 7.5 meters for that portion of the building that has a depth greater than 17.0 meters. The rear lot line must be 7.5 meters from the structure."¹⁰⁷

The community on Ward's Island has been a residential community since 1881 when Eratus Wiman built the Bath House, and it was rented to six families. The gradual growth of the community that has evolved over time, by necessity, not by design. Architects have never officially planned houses on Ward's Island and as a result the vernacular character of the community still prevails. The design proposed by the architectural firm Black and Moffit attempts to minimize the integrity that the community still retains. Yet without a careful understanding of the past and how the architectural evolution occurred, we can obliterate generations of history. "When the man-made environment is meaningful, man is 'at home'. The places we have grown up are such 'homes'; we know exactly how it feels to walk on that particular pavement, to be between those particular walls, or under that

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Section 6(3)3.

particular ceiling."¹⁰⁸ Time is of the essence, in preserving Ward's Island. It is imperative that no new construction be initiated without careful consideration of its implication. Without it Toronto's history would no longer be so evident. Instead, yet another modern suburb would become appendage to the metropolis.

¹⁰⁸ Christian Norberg-Schultz, Genius Loci: Towards A Phenomenology of Architecture (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 50

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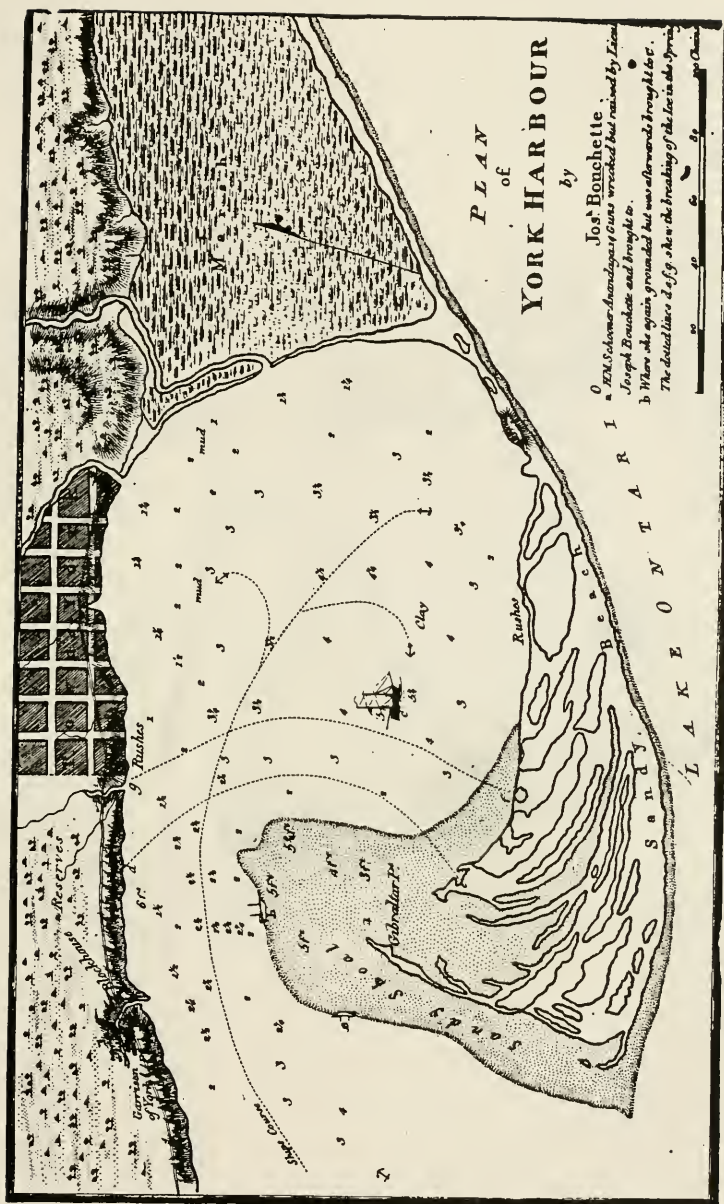
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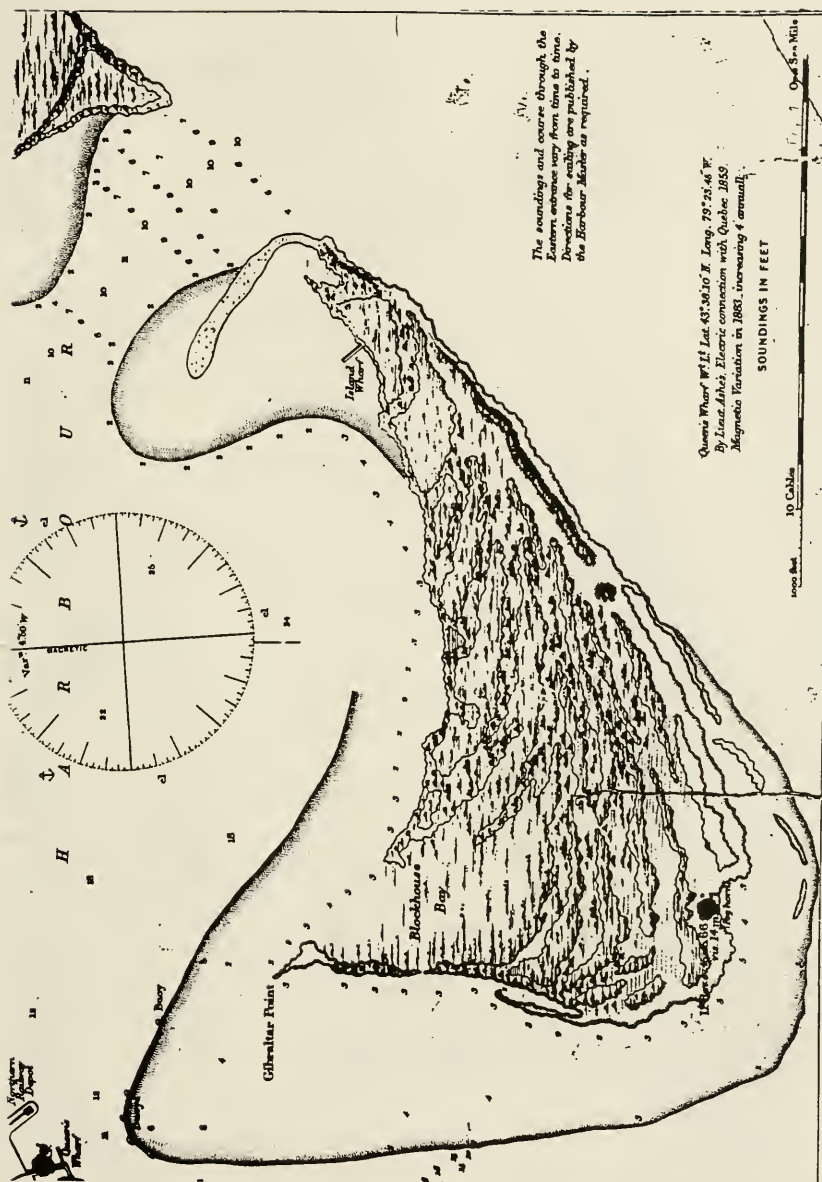


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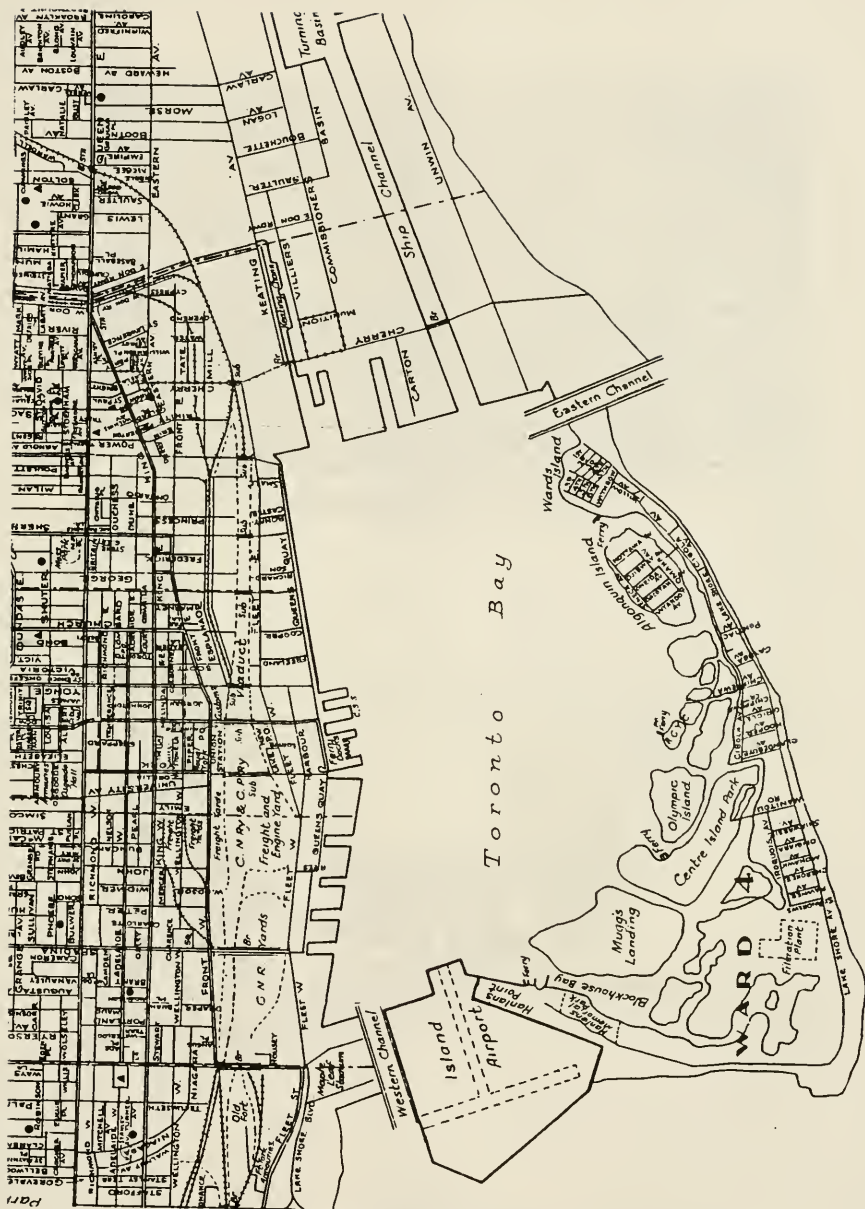


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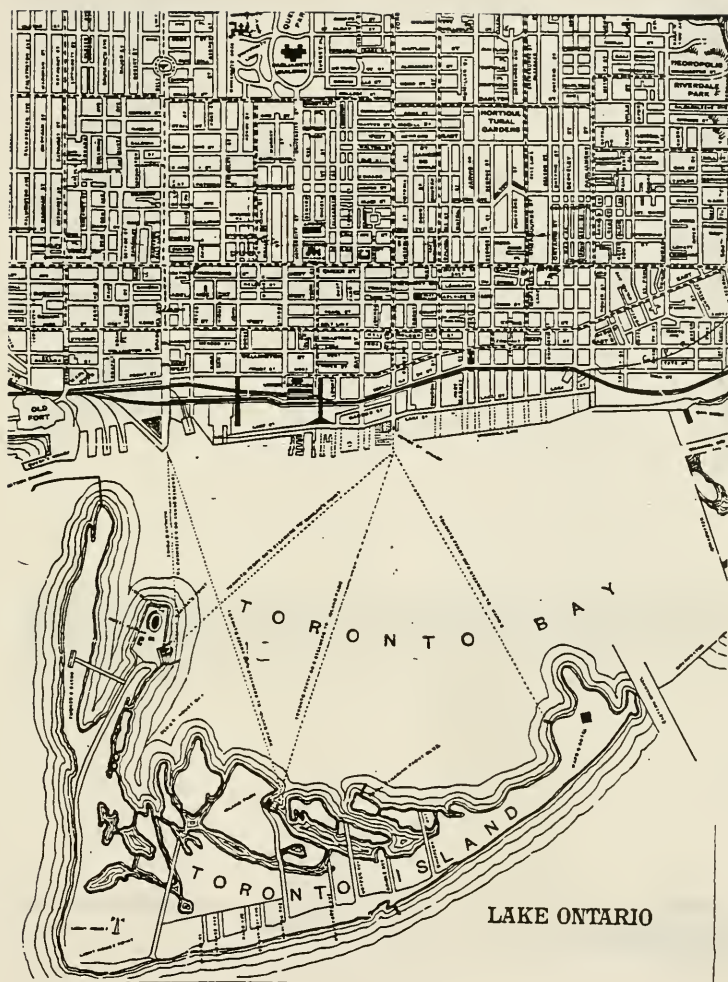


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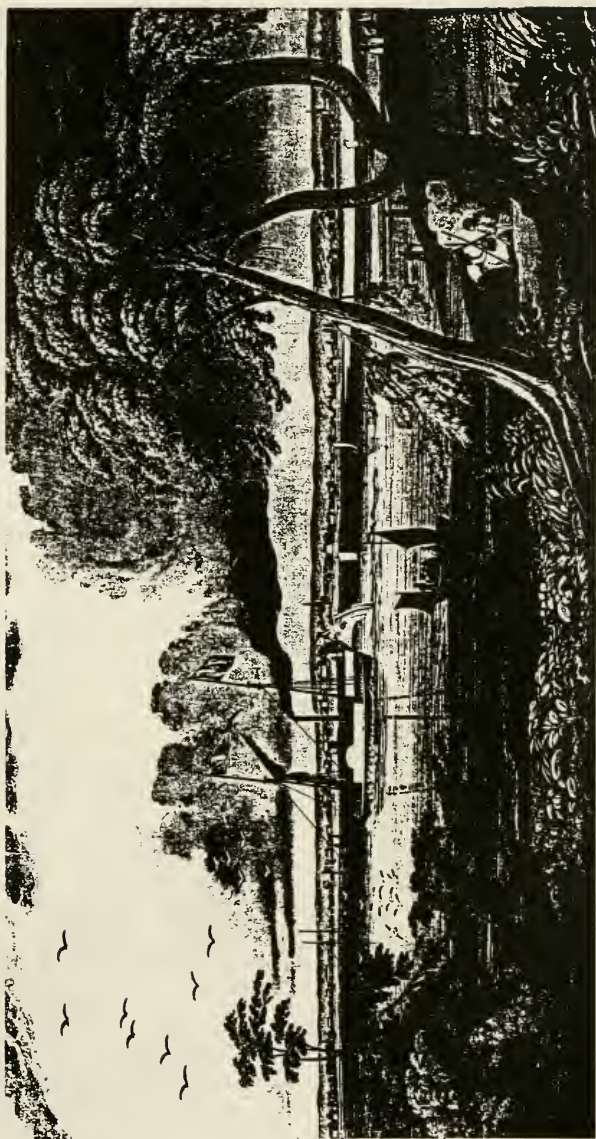


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Nick and Helma Mika. The Shaping of Ontario from Exploration to Confederation. Belleville, Ontario: Mika Publishing Co., 1985, 7.

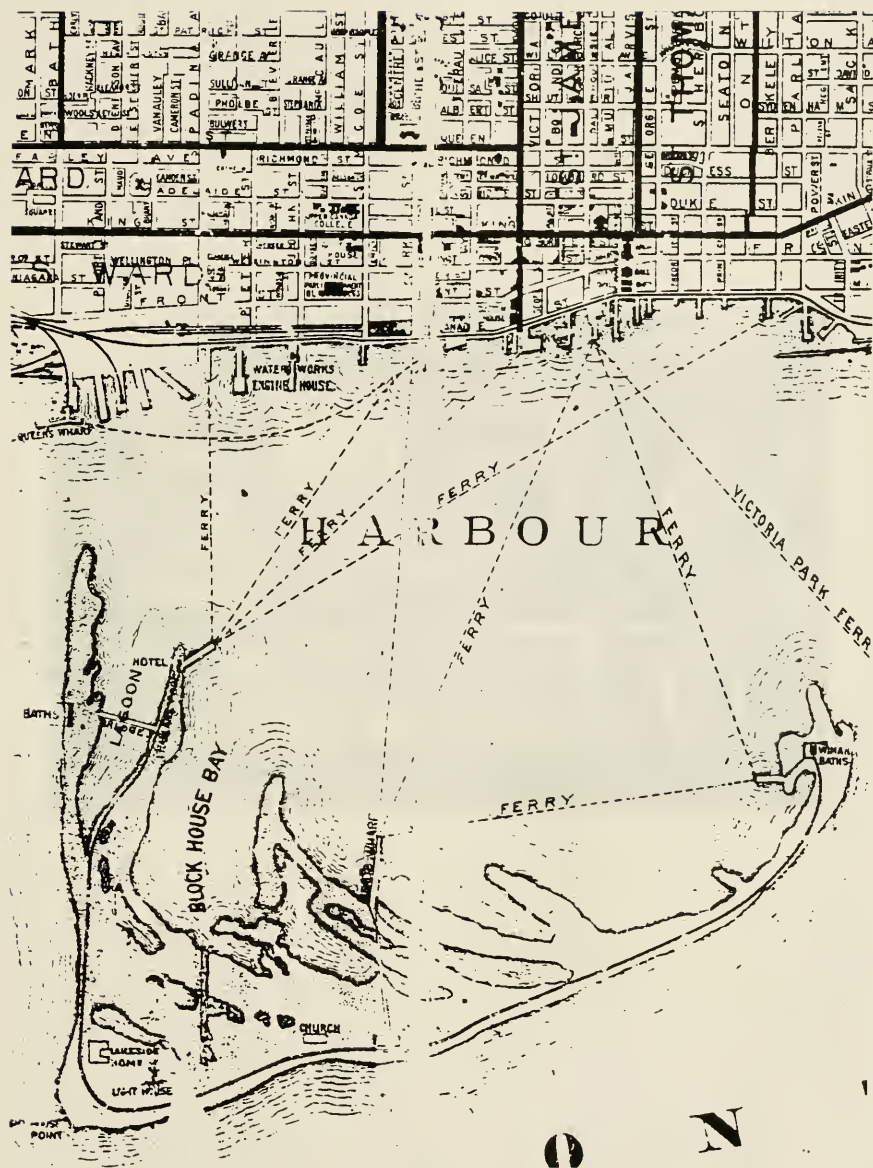


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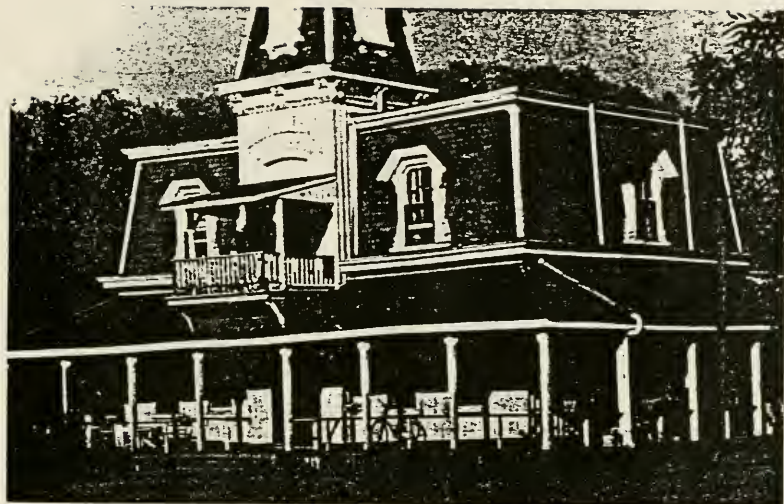
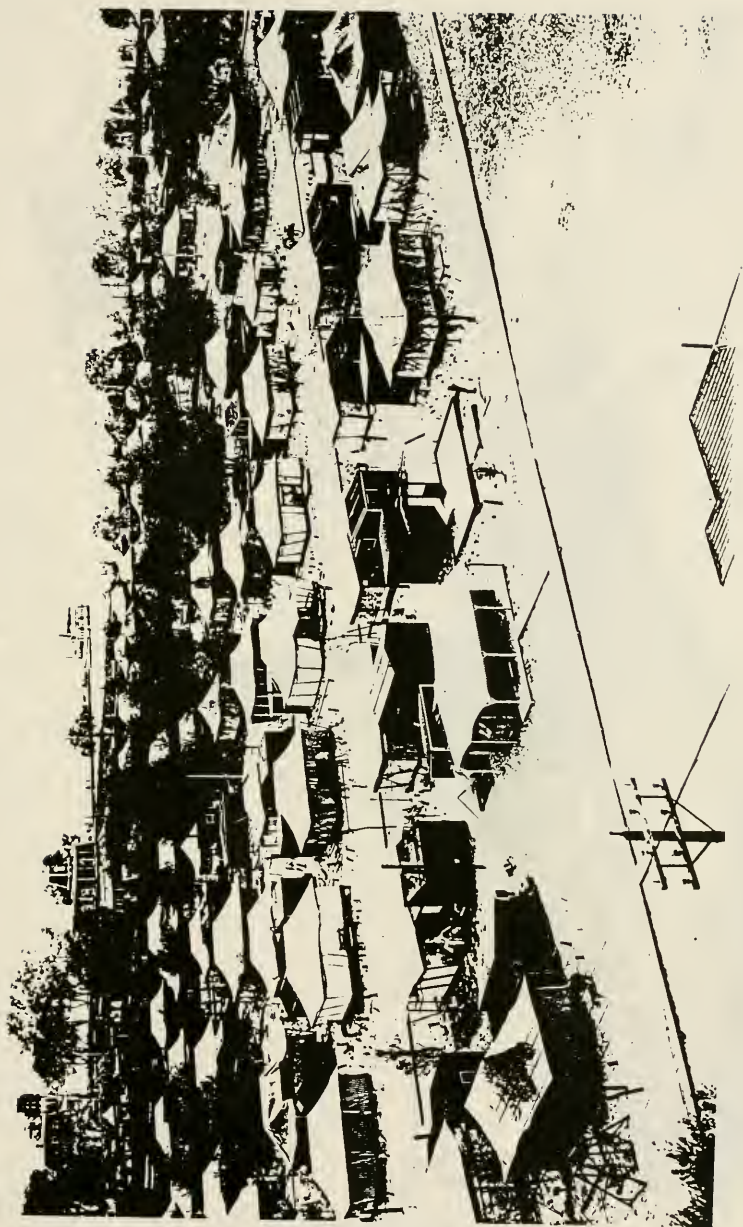


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Wolfe, Roy I. "The Summer Resorts of Ontario in the 19th Century" Ontario History. Toronto: The Ontario Historical Society, September 1962, Vol. LIV. No. 3, 161.



(N333)

Ward's Island 1911

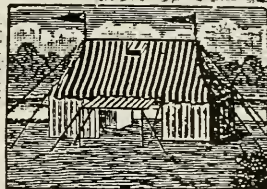
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Figure 14.
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William James Collection, Vol. 4. City of Toronto Archives, New City Hall.



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Figure 15.
Advertisement, Ward's Island Weekly, September 1, 1923.



Figure 16.
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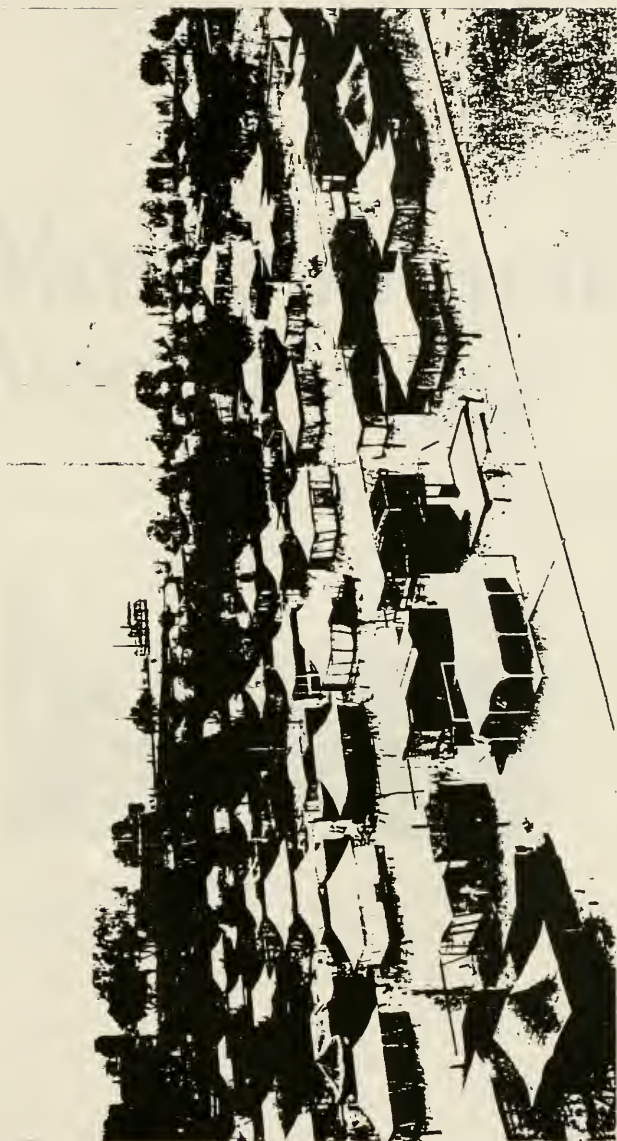


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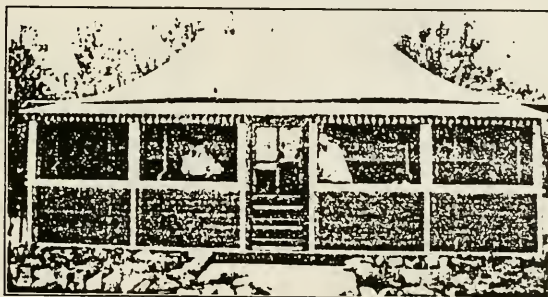
Ward's Island Weekly



Vol. 5 No. 2

WARD'S ISLAND, TORONTO

July 2, 1921



Where Ed. Howard spends his summer months. As a Tent House, Mr. Howard's place is certainly both practical and pretty. Ed. built the verandah—but we suspect that Mrs. Howard has to look after the beautiful flower beds that adorn it.

Figure 18.
The Addition of Verandahs. Ward's Island Weekly, July 2, 1921.

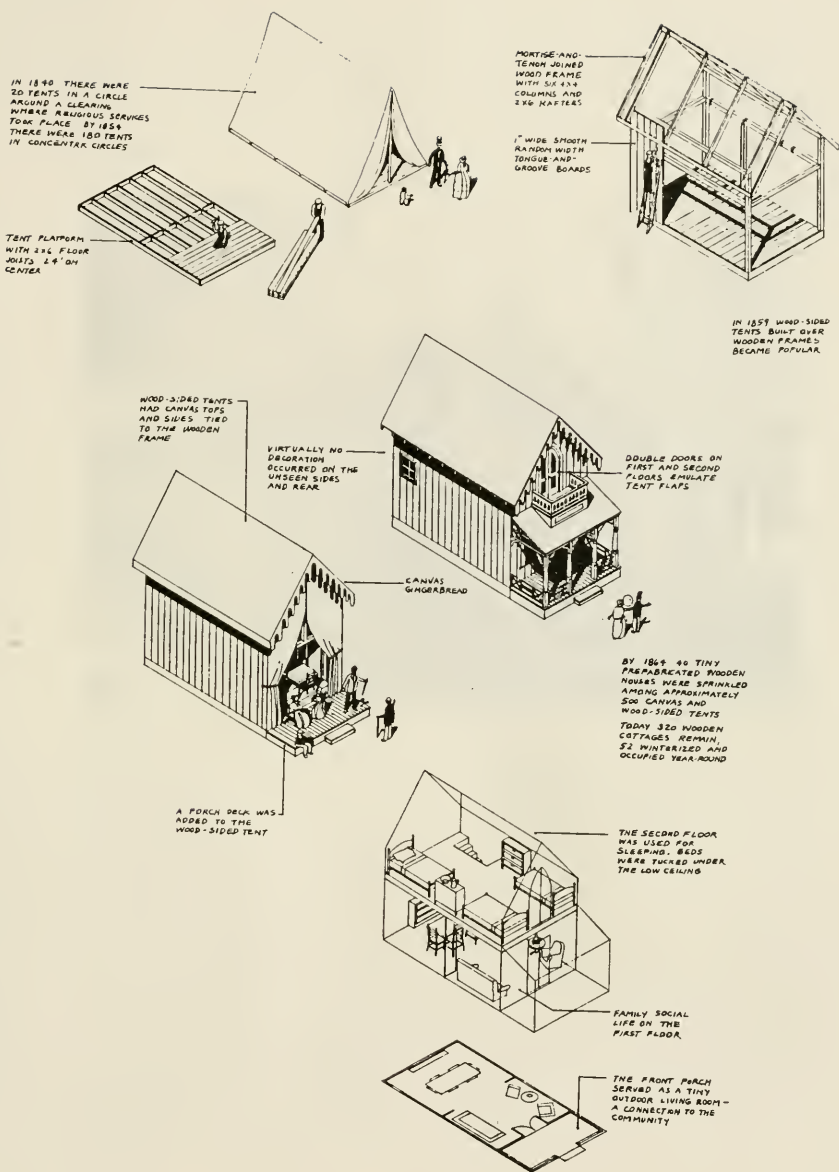


Figure 19.
 Lester Walker Tiny Houses.
 Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1987, 46, 47.

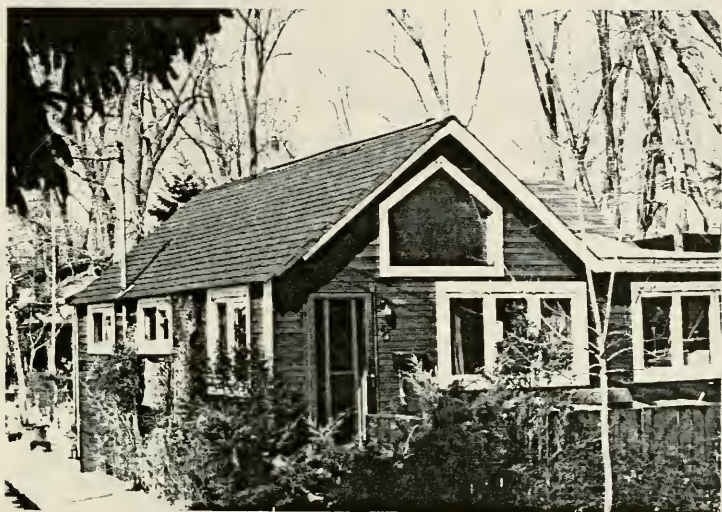


Figure 20.
8 Lakeshore Avenue.



Figure 21.
Mature Trees on Ward's Island.

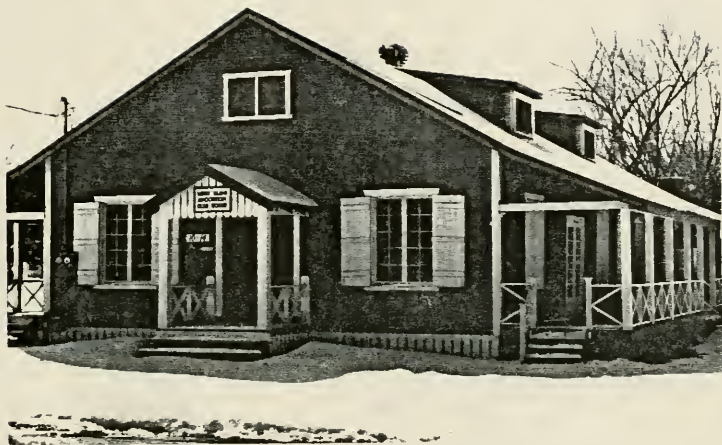


Figure 22.
Ward's Island Association Club House and Community Hall.

EATON'S SUMMER SERVICE

**Daily Delivery
To Island Residents!**

4 WAYS TO SHOP



- Drop your list in any EATON Order Box.

- Give list to EATON Island delivery man.

- Send your order by mail.

- Phone your order to:

TR. 5111 for any merchandise department, including EATON'S-College Street, or TR. 3311 for Provisions: Groceries, Meats, Vegetables and Fruits.



Order forms may be obtained from
EATON Delivery Man on the Island

T. EATON CO. LIMITED

Figure 23.
Advertisement. The T. Eaton Delivery Service to the Toronto Islands.
Ward's Island Weekly, August 5, 1933.



Figure 24.
One of the last three tents to convert to a "cottage" as it appears today.
11 Channel Street.



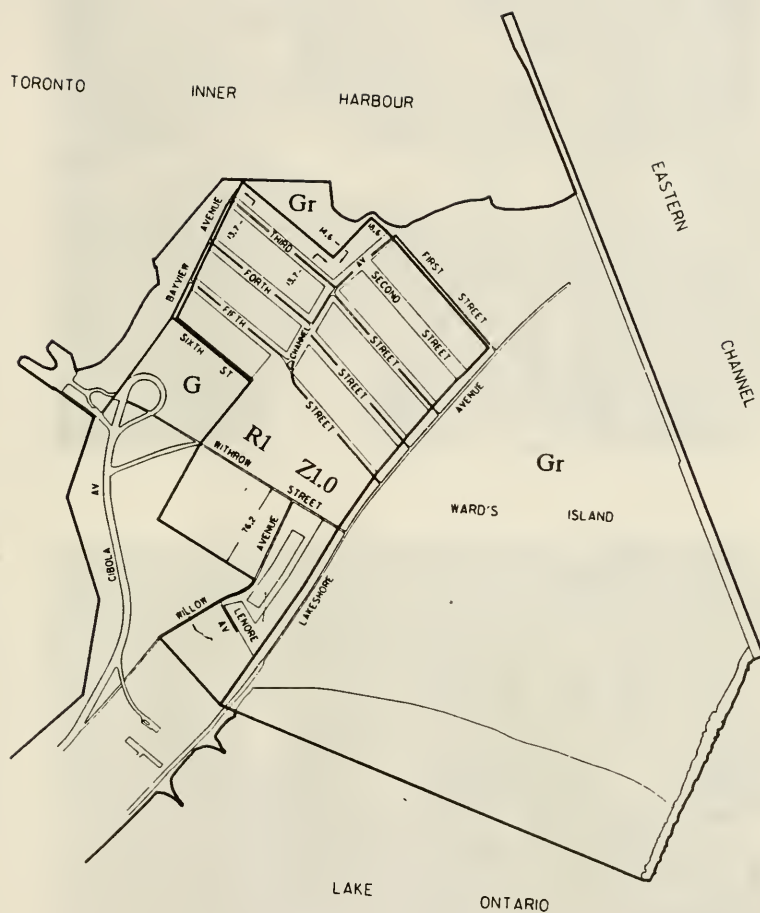
Figure 25.
One of the last three tents to convert to a "cottage" as it appears today.
10 First Street.



Figure 26.
One of the last three tents to convert to a "cottage" as it appears today.
12 Second Street.



Figure 27.
A cottage in decay as a result of poor insulation.



DISTRICT MAP 51F-323
CITY OF TORONTO
ZONING BY-LAW No.438-86
APPENDIX 'A'
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Figure 28.
City of Toronto By-Law No. 438-86.



Figure 29.
Two Examples of a new architectural hybrid on Ward's Island.

Anne & Jerome Fisher

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